

**Subjects of Poetry** are as many and diverse as the following list:- Adventure, Animals, Beauty, Bereavement, Birds, Carpe Diem, Children, Dance, Death, Descriptions, Faith & Religion, Family & Home, Flowers, Food & Drink, Friendship, Garden, Heroes, History, Holidays, Humour, Images, Imagination, Inspiration, Life, Love, Machines, Marriage, Memorials, Memory, Months, Music, Mystery, Nature, Parodies, Parting, Patriotism, People, Places, Poetry, Protest, Rhyme & Rhythm, Satire, School, Sea & Sailing, Seasons, Song, Sport, Stages of Life, Story Telling, Time, Time of Day, Travel, War, and the Weather.

### How to find a Subject

The poet is, at least to a certain extent, a player with words, and he/she makes what Auden has referred to as a “verbal contraption”. Words are to the poet what clay is to the sculptor, a tangible material. To what degree a poem is fashioned as a vehicle for an idea and to what degree as a verbal bauble created out of sheer exuberance varies with the poet and the occasion of the particular poem. A poem may begin with a line or phrase, and poets may feel their way to the poem’s final shape without having much idea how it is going to turn out. Some poets might begin with a feeling in their bones or a tickle in the end of their right index finger. In this case, one must cast around for a point of departure, a word, an image, or a remembered moment of illumination, to use as a springboard to plunge into the poem. When Les Murray was asked recently ‘where do his poems start from’ – his answer was – ‘they usually start half-way up my arm and work their way down.’ (Extract from *The Poet’s Manual* by Frances Spillman)

**Percy B. Shelley wrote:** *Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.*

**Exercise 1:** Choose one of the objects (or more) and decide what the subject might be, either ‘the lemon’, ‘the lemon tree’ or if you choose ‘a lemon tree and an olive tree’ the subject might be ‘an abandoned/backyard’. The objects are meant to evoke an image, an experience, a concept, an observation, a thought, or a memory.

### Exercise 2:

Continue with your poem, however, this time go on to some obscure subjects that you might not have previously thought about. e.g. imagined olive groves, pizza, Greek mythology. Remember you can make it up now, & research later.

- Make a list of descriptive words first
- Think about something special or unique to the subject
- The interior as opposed to the exterior, e.g. Lawrence’s Pomegranates
- Think of any other relation to the subject of your poem, such as its symbolism e.g. the apple as forbidden fruit, Llewellyn’s lemon as an “acerbic aunt”.

**In Greek mythology,** Gaia, or Mother Earth, presented a tree with golden apples to Zeus and his bride Hera on their wedding day. Guarded by Ladon, a serpent who never slept, the apple tree was in the garden of the Hesperides, daughters of the Evening Star. These golden apples became involved with many tales of love, bribery and temptation ranging from the abduction of Helen of Troy to the defeat and marriage of Atlanta. The sexual and romantic connotations of the apple were powerful

reasons why apples came as dessert at the end of the meal. They not only tasted heavenly and were good for digestion but were regarded as a cunning transitional aphrodisiac for the pleasures that followed. Is it any wonder that apples became the most sought after fruit on earth? They have taken their rightful place in the pleasure gardens of the wealthy throughout the world in spite of the almost instinctive knowledge that eating them may lead one to a life of chaos and destruction.

### **Pheasant**

by Sylvia Plath

You said you would kill it this morning.  
Do not kill it. It startles me still,  
The jut of that odd, dark head, pacing

Through the uncut grass on the elm's hill.  
It is something to own a pheasant,  
Or just to be visited at all.

I am not mystical: it isn't  
As if I thought it had a spirit.  
It is simply in its element.

That gives it a kingliness, a right.  
The print of its big foot last winter,  
The trail-track, on the snow in our court

The wonder of it, in that pallor,  
Through crosshatch of sparrow and starling.  
Is it its rareness, then? It is rare.

But a dozen would be worth having,  
A hundred, on that hill-green and red,  
Crossing and recrossing: a fine thing!

It is such a good shape, so vivid.  
It's a little cornucopia.  
It unclaps, brown as a leaf, and loud,

Settles in the elm, and is easy.  
It was sunning in the narcissi.  
I trespass stupidly. Let be, let be.

### **Passionfruit**

by Tracy Ryan

The faintest trace on fingers  
and we know you  
instantly, by scent

and that's just the outside,  
belle-laide,

elaborate  
as a Fabergé egg

useless really to feed us —

pure aesthetics  
tangled there  
on the bare fence,

basking in the same sun  
as concrete, asbestos

where it glances off  
but you are absorption

light transmuted  
to elusive dulcet  
concentration,

time biding,  
we watch you drop  
unapprehended,

purple patches  
in the baldest story.

Inside your chamber  
a viscous lining —

it feels like thieving —  
resistant sac,

the truth of the matter,  
thing-in-itself

without purpose  
save to draw out  
the essence of other things

grace note and garnish,  
pitted mnemonic,  
philosopher's stone,

bittersweet  
encapsulation.

### **Cabbages**

by Lorna Crozier

Long-living and slow,  
content to dream in the sun,  
heads tucked in, cabbages  
ignore the caress of the  
cabbage butterfly, the soft  
sliding belly of the worm.

You know it's crazy  
but they lie so still,  
so self-contained, you imagine them  
laying eggs  
in the earth's dark pockets,  
expect one morning they'll be gone,  
dragging themselves  
to the creek behind the house,

making their way  
with great deliberation  
to the sea.

### **Lettuce**

Raised for one thing  
and one thing only,  
lettuce is a courtesan  
in her salad days.  
Under her fancy crinolines

her narrow feet are bound.

### **Lemon**

by Kate Lllewellyn

Bitter breast  
of the earth  
I've picked this one  
From a dark green laden tree

this is a cold hard  
obdurate fruit  
yet one swift act  
releases the juice  
enhancing oysters  
fish and almost everything else

the acerbic aunt  
of the orchard  
beautiful in youth  
yet growing thorny  
in old age  
irritating  
irritable

when I move house  
the first tree I plant  
is a lemon

biblical  
dour and versatile  
I much prefer it  
to those cloying salesgirls  
the soft stone fruits

### **Pomegranates**

by Anthony Lawrence

Ornamental, serious as Christmas tree decorations  
without hand or face distorted in the globe.  
Yet how to test for ripeness  
with no tapering leaf to pull, no tropical smell  
or hollow sound when slapping the rind?

Press the skin hard to hear  
a muted crack, like the wafer-thin skull  
of a leaf-nosed bat caving in.  
Twist one from its light, suspended sleep  
to find a jester's collar of petals,  
or some projectile's exit wound in crimson tin.

Open it cleanly – two halves falling away  
to rock and settle, revealing precision and wet storage:  
the cells of an inverse mud wasp's nest  
containing blood capsules  
and the welcome puzzle  
of how to time a slow, sweet pulse of edible larvae.

Thirst is one solution.  
Palm and fruit under pressure, then, without the burden  
of guilt some may acquire from such metaphors,  
hear the head of the bat again  
                  until it dies away  
to a sound folding wings might make  
under the wet canopy of an oxygen factory, at dusk.

Now, with sailcloth needle or cake tester,  
make a hole and slip  
a straw to the pulped dark centre.  
Draw a line of juice, pink as plasma  
into the chamber to sour the plate of your tongue.

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